



From: Lucy Wendon

Community Manager

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To: The Planning Inspectorate, ref: Firethorn Developments Appeal/Inquiry of 6<sup>th</sup> June 2023

Dear Planning Inspector,

I first became concerned about the parking on Elmsbrook purely with respect to the Eco Business Centre, in Autumn 2019 when I started working in the role of Community Manager. I engaged with members of the Elmsbrook Traffic and Parking Group in 2020, when I realised that – once the initial Covid lockdown was over, the Eco Business Centre would already have enough members wishing to commute by car that the small car park we have would quickly be overrun.

Working together with the Traffic and Parking Group and Gagle Brook Primary School – whom I quickly came to understand had potentially even more serious parking issues – we presented our “current state-of-play and future issues” to several members of Cherwell District Council (CDC, including from the Planning department). We showed clearly how the Eco Business Centre car park was always – in early and final designs, and as it was built – significantly undersized compared to the vehicle trip targets.

We explained how this was already making hosting larger events very difficult; how we were not allowed to use any other land within easy walking distances; and how things would increase as the School and Business Centre populations increased in the future. We showed how a solution was needed, for the Elmsbrook traffic alone, and proposed a number of partial or temporary measures, though also quoted Oxfordshire Highways who had stated that the next planning application affecting the area would need to help resolve it. CDC agreed with all we presented, and promised to help; however, sadly, nothing ever came of this.

Now in 2023, members fill the car park – we have had to reserve spaces on a “one per company” basis – and the remainder fill available “unofficial” spaces in the surrounding side streets, or in some cases have arrangements to park on Elmsbrook-friends’ drives.

Members of the Elmsbrook Community Organisation (ECO) and Traffic and Parking Group made me aware of the proposed Firethorn development, and kept me updated regarding progress with the potential areas affecting the Eco Business Centre and our members, in particular regarding the traffic congestion aspects.

When discussions began regarding forming a team of local affected community groups and organisations to take part in the Planning Appeal which you are presiding over, I immediately recognised that myself/TownSq, on behalf of all at the Eco Business Centre, needed to be a part of this. I therefore became part of the “North West Bicester Alliance.”

While I have not been part of the committee who have worked together on all the analysis, reviews and documentation, I have read documents relating to the traffic congestion impacts which affect the Eco Business Centre, along with a synopsis of the independent traffic analysis report produced by D Mason Consulting for us.

From these, it is clear that the Firethorn application, as proposed, risks “gridlocking” the entire area in the 8-9am peak hour. This would make it very difficult for those of our members who travel by car or bus to reach their place of work at the Eco Business Centre, delayed getting into Elmsbrook and to finding a space to park. It will also make it more difficult and less safe for cyclists and foot-commuters needing to cross Charlotte Avenue during this period in order to reach their office.

Running an Eco Business Centre located on our amazing Eco town – the first in the UK, and supporting many start-ups and small organisations, including several who work on environmental projects, it concerns me greatly that the impact from the proposed 138 homes being added would increase pollution from more cars and engines running for the extra journey times. I am also shocked to see how many national and local planning policies also goes against!

My primary concern would be the impact on the success of the Eco Business Centre in the medium-term: if our members leave, because they cannot get here in a sensible time, then we would become economically viable, and risk failing before the long-term when (hopefully) personal car traffic levels are eventually reduced.

On behalf of TownSq, Perch @ The Eco Business Centre, and all of our members, I hope you will consider and fully appreciate the large detrimental effect that allowing this Appeal would have on us, and the rest of the growing Eco town Community (– which is, by the way, an amazing thing). Please see that 138 homes added to Charlotte Avenue will not work: and rule such that the Firethorn phases must be redesigned in a way that doesn’t cause all the damage and issues.

Yours gratefully,

**Lucy Wendon**

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09.05.23